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(CLASSIFICATION)

21 August 1962

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Interesting Items from Recent Chiefs of Stations MonthlyLetters

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The following report is contained in the 10 August 1962 monthly letter from Richardson, COS Saigon:

1. I am sending to you the following comments which have grown out of the Station's concern with the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program and with the guerrilla war being fought here. We have the impression that perhaps some American officials as well as segments of the American public may occasionally find themselves puzzled as to why the South Vietnamese Government has not shown more decisive results more quickly in this war against the Viet Cong. Sometimes, there is a tendency to look in almost every other direction to explain the problems of the situation rather than at the nature of the guerrilla war itself. There is no doubt in the minds of most of us here that President Diem, Ngo Dinh Nhu, Ngo Dinh Can, Minister Thuan, Minister Luong, and other governmental leaders, as well as commanders of the armed forces, have made sustained and vigorous efforts to prosecute this war successfully. As far as I can make out, there is no real data to the contrary. This is not to say that there are not bureaucratic lapses, organizational inertia characteristic of most organizations, lack of clear conceptions and understanding down through the various echelons, and so on. I think it is worth bearing in mind one statistic, namely that the Vietnamese armed forces, including the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps, have listed their losses from 1 January to 30 July as 7,497 (KIA, WIA, captured). This breaks down as follows: 2,589 (KIAO), 3,909 (WIA), and 999 (captured). These are rather heavy losses in fighting a guerrilla war which does not involve large-scale major engagements.

2. Ambassador Nolting has read our comments and fully endorses them. MAC/V has also read these comments and Major General Richard Weede informs me that MAC/V concurs.

3. These comments are made with particular reference to problems relating to the developing Viet Cong threat in the highlands and in the Central Vietnam coastal regions:

(a) The Viet Cong are conducting their war in South Vietnam principally by guerrilla means through utilization of local inhabitants in place for supplies, recruits, intelligence, and auxiliary fighting elements.

(b) Efforts to counteract Viet Cong small unit tactics with primary or sole reliance on regular armed forces is to some extent like trying to destroy a hundred thousand flies with artillery. In large part, guerrillas must be isolated by counter guerrillas composed of inhabitants in place. Only through this means can sufficient and accurate tactical intelligence be obtained combined with immediate reaction which are all-important in a guerrilla war.

(c) The principal counter guerrilla approaches are the Strategic Hamlet and related programs and a Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program, both emphasizing local inhabitants' armed participation in guerrilla war. CIDG programs comprise successful Buon Enao-Type area development, Mountain Commandos, Trailwatchers, and such armed and fighting youth groups as Republican Youth, Force Populaire, Civic Action cadres, and Rural Rehabilitation Youth. These programs already show effectiveness in terms of tactical intelligence, quick reaction time, and resistance to the Viet Cong.

(d) While indispensable in this situation, regular armed forces in themselves will never be able to control the Laos border or hold the South Vietnamese mountain, plateau, and jungle areas. These areas give the Viet Cong routes of infiltration and control, base headquarters, training and supply centers, sanctuary, and a focus for the establishment of a liberation government. They are also geographically contiguous to Viet Cong staging bases in Laos. If these areas can be taken away from the Viet Cong, gradual mopping-up in the Delta and elsewhere should be greatly facilitated. The Viet Cong challenge in the Delta, while it must be met and overcome, should not divert attention from the vital strategic center represented by the mountains, plateau, and jungle.

(e) CIDG programs must be increased in pace, scope, and impact to achieve their proper significance in a guerrilla war or they will otherwise prove to be an inadequate response to the strategic requirements. If acceleration is achieved, the results of these counter guerrilla programs should provide the VNAF and ARVN with additional and adequate tactical information, possibility for faster reaction, forced grouping of Viet Cong targets, and various kinds of screening and auxiliary support.

(f) With acceleration and augmentation of the CIDG programs and continued steady progress on the Strategic Hamlets program, the nature of the war in South Vietnam could change significantly in our favor within eighteen months. Ambassador Nolting and the rest of us believe that the beginning of a change for the better is already evident.

signed

E. H. Knoche
Assistant to the Director